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Chitral



Mastuj we found a horrible place. The valley is much broader than usual, and at one time probably held much cultivation; there is but little now. The fort is close to the junction of the Laspur valley, down which we had come, and the main valley, and we camped a mile beyond it, at the far end of the polo ground. Mastuj is about the windiest place I know; being at the junction of three large valleys there is always a wind, generally a gale.

In Afzul's territory we first saw the Chitralis show off on the "janáli," the exercise ground, which belongs to every fair-sized village. We used to be taken to this before reaching our camp, and had to sit for some time, either on our horses or on the ground, watching various feats of arms. A high pole is set up, on the top of which are fixed gourds, sometimes silver globes full of dust, and man after man dashes by at full gallop and fires at these marks. They load their guns as a rule with a cylinder of wood instead of a bullet, though a handful of fine pebbles, or a charge of shot if they can get it, does not come amiss. The latter practice is not regarded as quite fair. The mark is occasionally hit, the prize going to the lucky marksman. Sometimes you are treated to an exhibition of archery, the riders flying by and shooting at a mark on a mound of earth. The bows are very strong, being made of markhor horn, but the shooting is, as a rule, of the poorest. This sort of thing, though interesting when you first see it, becomes very wearisome when you are constantly called on to sit in a hot sun for an hour or more after a long march to watch it. But the humours of the scene were various. Afzul fairly took my breath away one day during

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huge red spots, finished off with bright red trousers, a costume at once startling and effective.

We rode in this way three miles to the bridge, which we dismounted to cross, then on past the fort, which Robertson was a few years later to know so well, and to assist in defending so splendidly, to the polo ground. There the usual performance was gone through, but on a greater scale than I had seen before, with many more riders and more brilliantly arrayed. Then we rode back to my camp, which was in an orchard a few hundred yards from the fort, I having had quite enough of riding hand-in-hand with my host, a custom which, however honourable, involves you in difficulties when you have to ride over small stone walls, narrow water-courses, and in and out of deep ravines. The Mehtar took his leave after a few minutes' conversation, and soon after sent us in a most excellent dinner cooked by the ladies of his household. In the couple of hours I had been with him he had made a deep impression on me. He was a fine old man, a striking figure as he rode along, sitting his horse upright and well; and had the history of his forty years of rule been unknown, there was that in him which attracted your attention at once. I felt instinctively that I was face to face with a ruler of men.

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camp, the outside being composed of Bokhara silk in broad bands of red and gold. Our first halt was at Shoghot, a point at which all the roads leading over the passes mentioned above converge. We passed over the Chitrali racecourse on the way, a stretch nearly four miles long of flat ground which, once cultivated, has been ruined by floods, and is one mass of sand and stones. At the far end of the plain is a raised mound, the Mehtar's grand stand, and the course was the full distance. How any horse could survive being raced four miles over the stones is difficult to understand, but they did. Afzul-ul-Mulk amused me by saying he had a horse which was undefeated over this course, and that he much regretted he had not taken him to Calcutta and entered him at the races there, as he certainly would have won the Viceroy's Cup, the Derby of India. After passing over this open ground, the road runs through a limestone gorge, with absolutely perpendicular sides.

As it was now autumn, and the rivers had shrunk, we marched as a rule up the bed of the stream, which was crystal clear and full of fish, fording a dozen times a day with the water to our saddle-flaps. The trees were just turning, and every valley you looked up was ablaze with "the flying gold of the ruined woodland." We passed many wild duck decoys, at constructing which the Chitralis seem very clever. They run off a portion of the stream on to a flat field, making a pool twenty yards or so square, at one corner of which the water runs in. Here they make a wicker cage with a wide mouth and tunnel gradually tapering up-stream.

[When leaving Chitral -- Analyst]

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anything which is told him will get into difficulties. 649
You must learn to disbelieve any story told you, however plausible, unless you have proof positive from other sources of its accuracy; your first thought when any statement is made must always be what is the speaker's motive, especially if he has told you the truth. No man ever approaches the object he aims at directly. By roundabout and devious paths he will lead up to his point, which is perhaps only brought out casually at the end of a long interview. You live in an atmosphere of falsehood and deceit, the men you do business with lying freely and unblushingly on every available occasion; but they bear you no ill-will when you expose their little lapses, and at once set to work to weave some new plot. The Mehtar was a past master in the art, and it was a never-failing source of excitement and interest to have dealings with him. We got to know each other fairly well by the end of the next four years.

In the afternoon of the last day we spent together 541 ●
we went off to look on at polo. The game was dull, 535
for the players were indifferent, and the ground, at each end of which cropped up huge rocks, was half under water. But the show was diversified by the Mehtar producing various rifles, and making some very fine shooting at a mark across the polo ground, firing over the heads of the players. Then followed the usual dances, one a sword dance to the music of the royal band, the drummer in which, who had only one tooth in his upper jaw, fascinated Robertson and me by his excitement and animation, throwing his arms about frantically, his whole face lighting up,

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541 and his eyebrows working furiously in time to the
535 dancing. After the Chitralis had danced, some Bajouri Pathans present gave us an exhibition, the most picturesque piece of dancing we had seen. Five men, dressed in the loose flowing blue Pathan shirt, formed a circle round a flower thrown on to the ground, and danced round it, alternately advancing and retiring, swaying their bodies forward till their heads nearly touched in the centre of the ring, then throwing up their arms and swinging back their bodies and dancing away, their clothes flying and giving a wonderful grace and go to the dance. They then gave us another dance, also in most perfect time, to a plaintive song which they sang, their faces indicative of the deepest grief. This was followed by a wild repetition of the first dance, much faster, and with more dashing action, the accompaniment on the part of their friends being the rapid discharge of their guns. The flower in the centre represented a lovely maiden, and the dance tells the tale of a love story ending in an elopement.

159 Next morning the Mehtar paid me what was really his final visit, presented me with a last horse, badly galled, and recapitulated all his wants and views. We parted after an exchange of many civil speeches, and promises of eternal friendship, with genuine regret on my side, for I had got to like the old man very much, and to admire his strength of
487 character and undoubted powers. We returned to
133 Mastuj by the right bank of the river, making a detour through some of the higher valleys. The road the first day was very bad in parts; one awful cliff, across which it seemed to run for miles,